

VZCZCXRO2454
OO RUEHAG RUEHROV
DE RUEHMD #2630/01 2910715
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 180715Z OCT 06
FM AMEMBASSY MADRID
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1061
INFO RUEHKK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHLA/AMCONSUL BARCELONA PRIORITY 2159
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0228

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MADRID 002630

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/17/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [SP](#)
SUBJECT: SPAIN: MORATINOS MEETINGS IN DAMASCUS

REF: A. LLORENS-ALLEGRONE TELCON OF 10/13

[1](#)B. MADRID 1564

MADRID 00002630 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Political Counselor Kathy Fitzpatrick; reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

[1](#)1. (C) A senior member of Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos' staff called in Political Counselor on 10/17 to provide a written readout for the Secretary of Moratinos' 10/14-15 visit to Damascus. A scanned copy of this document was e-mailed on the classified system to EUR/WE. We have made minimal edits to this copy for the purpose of clarity:

BEGIN TEXT.

-- Visit to Damascus, 14 and 15 October 2006. I (FM Moratinos) met with President Assad who was accompanied only by Syrian FM Mu'allim. Later on I also saw Deputy PM Dardari who is in charge of reform. The general impression is positive. My perception is that Assad has changed, not only in his general attitude or even body language, but also in the way he reacted to my questions and proposals. He confirmed his willingness to work efficiently and constructively towards regaining the trust of the international community. Without using the traditional Syrian rhetoric, he was clear and to-the-point. I saw him focused and aware of the need to seize the opportunity. He believes that it would be possible to reopen the Syria track where it was left before his father passed away. Madrid remains the best framework.

-- His main concern is to ensure that the international community pushes for global peace, hence including Syria. However, he seems also ready to help in the Palestinian and Lebanese issues.

-- I insisted that a positive Syrian role in the Palestinian issues (kidnapped Israeli soldier and negotiations for a new Government) would be the best way to prove that Syria is part of the solution and no longer part of the problem. I think my point was well taken.

-- On the soldier issue he undertook to keep helping the Egyptians. General Soliman, with whom he had just met that morning, told him that Israel would be ready to exchange 500 prisoners. However, talks were not advancing too much. It was important to help all sides to reach a suitable solution. I encouraged him to continue using all his influence to get the release of Israeli soldiers both in Gaza and Lebanon.

-- Concerning the formation of a new Palestinian Government he praised the work carried out by Qatari FM Sheikh Hammad.

Despite progress made, the negotiations bogged down.

-- I proposed that both Syrian and Qatari officials meet with representatives from Hamas and Fatah in order to explore new language. Assad agreed and instructed FM Mu'allim to prepare for such a meeting. Mu'allim told us later that Hamas (Meshaal) has also accepted. The meeting, which should be secret, could then take place after the end of Ramadan in

SIPDIS
Damascus.

-- I touched base with Qatari FM to share with him the proposal. He was positive and we agreed that we will see each other in a few days in Madrid to develop it further.

-- I also contacted Abu Mazen to seek his views about the proposed meeting. He was receptive and undertook to get back to me in a few days.

-- As to Lebanon, Assad was concerned about the internal situation. He believes that there is a risk of rapid deterioration. He thinks that PM Siniora is doing well and he should be supported. However, the international support should be given not only to him but to the Lebanese Government as a whole. He thinks that Siniora should build bridges to Hezbollah. If he leans too much towards Sunni or Christians leaving Shia outside, he would be running an unnecessary risk. The best option would be to support National Lebanese consensus.

-- Deputy PM Dardari looked committed to take the reform process forward. He is serious and result-oriented. Although he is not obviously supported by the 'Old Guard', he seems aware of the need to open the Syrian economy quickly and to take bold decisions. My impression is that he feels he is supported by President Assad.

//SPANISH REASONING ON VISIT//

MADRID 00002630 002.2 OF 002

12. (C) Immediately prior to his trip to Damascus, Moratinos told the Ambassador that he was going to Syria at the behest of Israel to explore the possibilities of moving forward on the release of the two Israeli soldiers kidnapped by Hizballah. The Ambassador contacted Israeli Ambassador to Spain Victor Harel to further explore this information. Harel said that there had been no official request to Moratinos to undertake such a visit to Syria and insisted that Moratinos was acting on his own.

13. (C) When asked by PolCouns, Moratinos' staffer said that Moratinos' visit was also closely linked to Spain's desire to break Syria's isolation. (PolCouns emphasized that the USG was not seeking third party interlocutors with Damascus, nor did we encourage or support such high-level contacts with Syria, noting the broad US-UN-EU consensus on this subject. However, she expressed appreciation for the points and for Moratinos' desire to keep the Secretary informed).

//COMMENT//

14. (C) FM Moratinos has long sought to make Spain a more relevant player in the Middle East Peace Process, due in large part to his long-standing engagement in the region - as well as his desire to normalize relations with Syria. The MFA has reflected this position for the last several months, including in a conversation between PolCouns and MFA Director General for the Middle East and Africa Alvaro Iranzo in MFA meetings with visitors from the NEA Front Office (Ref B). Moratinos' visit to Syria came only five days after Spanish media reported on a telephone conversation between President Zapatero and Assad, indicating broad support within the Spanish Government to increased contacts with Syria. To that end, Moratinos' visit is likely intended to send a signal to

other EU governments that they should not shy away from direct contact with Syrian leaders, nor from travel to Damascus. At the same time, Moratinos' approach on the Israeli prisoner may be a way for him to demonstrate his value to both sides.

AGUIRRE